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Choosing your Doctor

DEPOSITORY
OCT 12 2001
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Medical Services to Consumers

ILLINOIS
DEPARTMENT OF
PROFESSIONAL
REGULATION

100 W. Randolph St., Suite 9-300
Chicago, Illinois 60601
www.dpr.state.il.us

What services does the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation provide to consumers?

The Illinois Department of Professional Regulation (IDPR) is a government agency which licenses and disciplines physicians and surgeons, chiropractors, along with nearly fifty other professions that consumers come in contact with daily. The Department provides two principal types of consumer services: license information, and investigation of complaints against doctors.

IDPR is not a physician referral service. That is, we cannot direct you to a physician in your community to be your doctor. However, this brochure should make choosing a doctor easier for you.

How to choose your doctor...

Choosing a qualified medical doctor is an important element of your health care. You should have a primary care physician who is responsible for your overall medical care. In the event you need a specialist, (for example, a cardiologist or dermatologist) your primary care physician will generally refer you to one.

Many specialists will not accept a patient unless he or she has been referred by a primary care physician. In addition, many insurance plans will not pay for a specialist's care unless you have been referred.

The main types of primary care physicians are:

- Family Practice
- General Practitioner
- Internist/Internal Medicine (specialist in the diagnosis of internal diseases and disorders)
- Obstetrician/Gynecologist (specialist in women's health)
- Pediatrician (specialist in the care of children and adolescents)

1 Gather names

If you have health insurance, you should first contact your insurance company and find out if there is a list, or "panel", of physicians who participate in your

plan. Many insurance companies, including Preferred Provider Organizations and Health Maintenance Organizations, will pay only physicians who are approved providers that have agreed to certain conditions for payment. If your company has such a panel, you will need to choose from the list of members.

If you have moved recently, your physician from your previous community may be able to recommend someone in your new area.

Ask friends or family if they know a physician who has provided quality care to them in the past.

Contact your local medical society to see if they offer a physician referral service. If so, they can provide you names of physicians in your area based on the kind of doctor you need. Hospitals and local clinics can also give you names of physicians to consider.

To find a medical society, look in the white pages under (name of your county) Medical Society. Some phone books also list societies under *Consumer Protection, Physicians and Surgeons, or Associations.* For hospitals or clinics, look in the yellow pages.

2 Ask questions

In looking for any type of service you would first check qualifications and references. In finding a good doctor, you should do the same by calling or writing the physician you are considering, or talking to the doctor's staff. Be prepared to openly discuss your individual needs, and ask the following questions:

- Are you accepting new patients?
- What insurance plans do you accept?
- Do you have staff privileges at a hospital? If so, has that hospital ever restricted your privileges? Can you admit patients to the hospital? (Privileges means that the hospital has agreed to let a doctor use its facilities.)
- Do you practice independently, or are you a member of a medical group or clinic?
- If you are in a medical group, how many members are in it, and will they take your calls in your absence?
- Are you certified by a medical specialty board? Which one(s)? (Specialty boards determine if a

physician has advanced qualifications to practice a specialty, such as surgery, obstetrics, opthamology, etc. Specialty certification typically requires several years of additional training, and passing an examination.)

(NOTE: The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) is a private organization which certifies specialty boards. Call 1-800-776-2378 between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. Eastern Standard Time to check if a doctor's certifying board is ABMS approved. The ABMS can also give you the phone number of the certifying board so that you can verify your physician through them.)

3 Access IDPR's Web site

When you have selected a physician that fits your needs as a health care consumer, access IDPR's License Look-up on the internet at www.dpr.state.il.us to verify the doctor's license. License look-up will provide you the doctor's medical license number, current status (active, probation, etc.), original licensure date, license expiration date, and if the doctor has ever been disciplined.

If a physician has been disciplined in the past ten years, our Web site will provide you the details regarding the action. Disciplinary actions include a reprimand, probation, suspension and so forth.

If you do not have access to the Internet, you may write to:

Illinois Department of Professional Regulation
Attention: LMU1
320 W. Washington, 3rd Floor
Springfield, Illinois 62786

(NOTE: The Department cannot recommend a doctor, or any other professional.)

4 Check Court Records

To learn if any malpractice lawsuits have been filed against a physician, you may check the county's "civil index." This index is typically maintained by the clerk's office of the Circuit Court in your county.

If there are recent malpractice lawsuits, talk to the doctor for an explanation. Always keep in mind that anyone can file a lawsuit at any time. The existence of a suit does not automatically indicate the physician is incompetent or negligent. A pattern of lawsuits, however, may be cause for concern.

5 Schedule an Appointment

When you have decided on a physician, make an appointment to meet in person with him or her. It is better to meet the doctor in a consultation appointment rather than in an emergency. This also provides you an opportunity to decide if you are comfortable with your new doctor, the facility, and support staff.

It is equally important that the physician feels comfortable with treating your individual problems, and meeting your needs as a consumer. Thus, he or she may ask you personal questions about your medical history, and the types of treatment you have received in the past. Be truthful in answering his or her questions since the quality of care you receive greatly depends on your honesty.

6 If you have a problem with your physician

The Department of Professional Regulation is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of physicians and surgeons that have violated the Illinois Medical Practice Act.

If you feel your physician has violated the law, you are encouraged to file a complaint on our Web site at www.dpr.state.il.us, contact the Department's Complaint Intake Unit at 312-814-6910, or you can request a complaint form from:

Illinois Department of Professional Regulation
ATTN: Complaint Intake Unit
100 W. Randolph St., Suite 9-300
Chicago, Illinois 60601

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www.dpr.state.il.us

- License Look-up
- File a complaint about a doctor

www.ama-assn.org

- Check out your doctor's education
- Find out specialty information
- Get your doctor's address and affiliations

www.certifieddoctor.com

- A service of the American Board of Medical Specialities
- Determine if your doctor is board certified

Printed by authority of the State of Illinois
November 2000

DPR-DOC